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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the women's movement of the 1960's and 1970's, sexism has emerged as an issue in American education. Sexism refers to rigidly prescribed and therefore limiting roles for either sex. The American school, since its beginning, has been given the responsibility for teaching attitudes and values and for preparing young people for successful personal, occupational, and social adjustment. In preparing girls and boys for traditional sex roles, the school has been reflecting the society that maintains it. Feminists argue that schools must now take a more decisive role in shaping society in new and truly egalitarian directions that will guarantee full personhood for every child, male or female. This booklet discusses the pervasiveness of sex stereotypes, the roles of the school and of parents in socialization, sexism in curricular materials, sexism in school organization, teacher training for change, and a direct teaching strategy focusing on women's studies. (Author)

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# Sexism: New Issue in American Education

Pauline Gough

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**PAULINE GOUGH**

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Eleven years of "retirement" as a homemaker and mother of three followed, before she ventured into her second career. She earned the B.S. degree in elementary education from Moorhead (Minn.) State College in 1970, and since that time has taught sixth, first, and fifth grades at University Elementary School in Bloomington, Indiana. She completed the M.S. degree in 1972 at Indiana University, where she is now a doctoral candidate.

She has published articles on sexism in basal readers and on use of a direct teaching-strategy to raise middle-graders' consciousness of sexism in the school and society. She also served as assistant leader of a Horizons Session on teaching without sex stereotyping, at the 1975 annual study conference of the Association for Childhood Education International.

# SEXISM: NEW ISSUE IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

By Pauline Gough

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## SEXISM: NEW ISSUE IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

The past decade has seen a rebirth of American feminism, dormant since 1920 when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified and granted women the right to vote. In the wake of this women's movement of the 1960s and '70s, sexism has emerged as an issue in American education.

As it was first used, the term sexism meant discrimination against one sex, women. Today, the term has been broadened to describe rigidly prescribed and thereby limiting roles for either sex.

Today's feminists, like the suffragettes of the nineteenth century, exhibit a spectrum of attitudes ranging from conservatives intent on legislative change to improve the status of women to radicals who hope to revolutionize the whole of American society. But regardless of political persuasion within the women's movement, all neofeminists have agreed on one thing: sex-typing and socialization processes that relegate women to the home or to menial tasks in the labor force severely deter the American woman from becoming a functionally competent and autonomous human being. Thus, feminists quickly scrutinized the American school as an important agency of socialization.

The American school, since its beginning, has been charged with responsibility for teaching attitudes and values and for preparing youngsters for successful personal, occupational, and social adjustment. Paying lip service to "equal opportunity for all," the school does, in fact, carry out its charge in part by preparing boys and girls for traditional sex roles. Many would argue that, in doing this, the school merely reflects the society that maintains it. Feminists have countered that schools now must take a more decisive role in *shaping* society in new and truly egalitarian directions that will guarantee full personhood for every child, male or female.

## IS THE SCHOOL ALONE TO BLAME?

To what extent does the school perpetuate rigid sex roles? And what should we, as concerned parents or educators, be doing about it? To answer such questions, we must look first at other causal factors.

Whether sex differences in behavior exist is not questioned. The words "tomboy" and "sissy" attest to this, describing what the American culture perceives as sex-inappropriate behavior. "Real boys" act one way, and "real girls" act another.

Explanatory models for such behavioral differences vary, however, in ascribing them to one of three things: innate psychological differences, innate physiological or biological differences, or social processes of socialization and social controls.

Theories of innate psychological differences, such as those propounded by Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson, actually are not theories but belief systems. Because of their circularity, they cannot be verified. In other words, no solid evidence indicates that men and women are born with psychological differences that cause them to behave in different ways.

While the notion of an evolutionary genetic difference also lacks solid scientific support, some evidence, largely from studies of lower animals, suggests that hormones cause behavioral differences. Jerome Kagan also identified behavioral differences in very young male and female humans, such as a slight tendency among females to display fear and anxiety more frequently and more intensely than males, and to show a stronger tendency to withdraw. He hypothesizes that the earlier a behavioral difference appears, the more likely biological factors influence it, but he emphasizes that biological differences thus far identified do not

greatly affect the kinds of social and vocational roles men and women should assume in our society.

Meanwhile, other researchers, through studies of false hermaphrodites or children whose true sex gender is misjudged at birth, have provided strong evidence against the physiological theory as a total explanation of sex differences. Hormones should, in theory, make the true sex known; yet, children think of themselves as whatever they were labeled at birth, and this identity controls their behavior. Moreover, after age 3 or 4, it seems to be impossible to reverse a child's sex identity without severe psychological repercussions.

Margaret Mead worked with three South Pacific cultures: the Arapesh, who cultivate gentle, affectionate, generous dispositions in all their children; the Mundugumor, who socialize boys and girls alike to be competitive, aggressive, and independent; and the Tchambuli, who stylize behavior by sex, with women earning the tribe's sustenance while the men adorn themselves and their sacred objects. These studies lend further support to the idea that sex-role norms are not solely explained by innate physiological differences.

In fact, G. P. Murdock, in an anthropological study of more than 200 cultures, discovered that the only jobs performed exclusively by men in all cultures were hunting animals and pursuing sea mammals. Cultural assignment seems to dictate which sex does what task, not the nature of the task or differing biological endowments of males and females.

## ROLE OF PARENTS

Studies such as these make it clear that social processes play a part in determining sex-differentiated behavior within a given society. But it still is difficult to isolate the role of the school from that played by other socializing institutions, such as the family, the mass media, and models in the culture at large.

Much discussion in the past has focused on parental responsibility for assumed sex differences of males and females in such areas as cognitive style.

David Lynn, for instance, relates it to the task of the young child in achieving a sex-role identification. Because the mother or some female caretaker is generally at hand, he likens the female's task to rote learning of a *lesson*, with exploration and goal seeking minimized or omitted. Thus, he hypothesizes, the female early develops a cognitive style that eventually makes her better than male peers at rote memory, verbal fluency, and language usage. However, Lynn likens the male task of learning a masculine role identification to the learning *problem*, which demands exploration and goal seeking before the solution becomes clear, because males have to identify with a culturally defined role. This role is imposed, for the most part, by mothers and female teachers through a system of rewards and punishments. Therefore, Lynn suggests, boys get early practice at ignoring irrelevant cues and isolating significant ones, and they develop a cognitive style that makes them more apt at problem solving and using analytic skills. Lynn's hypothesis, while intuitively reasonable, lacks solid empirical documentation.

Eleanor Maccoby, on the other hand, has suggested that the difference in cognitive style stems from child-rearing prac-

tices that give boys earlier and greater independence. Such early independence has been demonstrated by H. A. Witkin to directly affect spatial ability. In terms of spatial ability, women have been shown to be more field dependent, which means they are less able to ignore the total visual context when performing tasks such as finding embedded figures. Maccoby believes that this field dependence indicates that females do not, on the whole, think as analytically as males because of the culturally assigned dependency role given them as youngsters in our society.

But more recently, Maccoby and Jacklin, after a review of some 2,000 books and articles, concluded that boys are not encouraged towards greater independence than girls. They also found no evidence that the sexes differ in analytic or rote learning abilities. In fact, they discovered that only four sex differences are well established by research: greater agression, visual-spatial ability, and mathematical ability perhaps as a consequence of more visual-spatial ability in boys, and greater verbal ability in girls. In addition, they found surprising similarity in child-rearing practices for boys and girls. Both sexes appeared to be treated with equal affection in the early years, both were encouraged to be independent and discouraged from dependency, and aggression seemed to garner no greater approval from parents of boys than from parents of girls. Maccoby and Jacklin did find that parents handled and played with boys more roughly, and gave them more praise and more punishment. This was particularly true of fathers, who actively discouraged their sons' interests in feminine toys, activities, or apparel.

Since child-rearing practices seem so similar for boys and girls, it appears that direct shaping by parents does not account completely for sex-typed behavior in the young. Imitation and reinforcement apparently play a role, but so, it seems, do models from a variety of nonparental sources, which the child uses to construct generalizations about sex-appropriate behavior.

Parents do seem to have higher expectations for boys than for girls, and this probably is a factor causing proportionally fewer girls to go on to college and to have careers, a fact well-documented by college statistics.

Parental expectations, subtly or overtly communicated, also may be a factor influencing the way girls feel about showing their intelligence. John Hollender in 1972 found a negative rela-

tionship between high grades and social self-esteem scores for high school females, but not for males. He suggested that females feel uncomfortable about academic achievement because this is not society's idea of appropriate sex-role behavior.

M. C. Shaw and J. T. McCuen, meanwhile, have gathered data showing that girls who were underachievers in high school usually began to underachieve at the onset of puberty. For boys, underachievement in high school usually started earlier. The researchers hypothesized that the achievement drop-off among girls as they reached maturity was linked to the adult female sex role. In other words, for female Americans it's not smart to be smart.

## SEX STEREOTYPES ARE PERVASIVE

There is little doubt that our society holds stereotypic images of the achieving male and the nurturant female. These images are purveyed not only by parents, but also by the mass media, as Betty Friedan first noted in 1963.

Although the situation has improved since 1963, a survey in 1974 of 350 television commercials indicated that many still pushed the cliché that the ultimate achievement in womanhood was providing a clean shirt and a hot meal. Reporting on the survey, Joan Levine, president and creative director of a Los Angeles advertising agency, noted that women wanted to be shown having a choice. Instead, they have been depicted primarily in two roles: sex object and housewife.

Commercial manufacturers of children's toys are another case in point. Janet Lever and Louis Goodman discovered in 1972, for example, that three out of four chemistry sets pictured only boys on the box tops; none pictured girls alone.

But manufacturers and advertisers, like parents and schools, seem merely to reflect sex roles accepted by the culture at large. Virginia O'Leary, in a 1974 review of research on attitudinal barriers to occupational aspirations in women, noted that most people, regardless of age, education, religion, sex, or marital status ascribed competency characteristics to men. These include such qualities as objectivity, decision-making ability, and business skill. Women, on the other hand, are seen as having traits in a warmth-expressiveness cluster, including such things as social graces and emotional support.

That those traits generally thought to be masculine also are more often socially desirable than those thought to be feminine



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has been shown by Inge Broverman and colleagues. In this study, three matched groups of clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers, including both males and females, were given identical lists of bi-polar traits. One group was asked to choose traits characterizing healthy males, a second group chose traits characterizing healthy females, and the third group chose traits of the healthy adult of unspecified sex. The traits listed for the clinically healthy male and healthy adult were identical, and totally different from those listed for the clinically healthy female.

## DIRE CONSEQUENCES

We generally assume, in this society, that children are better off if they conform to the prevailing sex-role stereotypes. Yet several studies indicate that a high degree of sex-appropriate behavior does not necessarily enhance and may even retard psychological and social adjustment of either males or females. And, in terms of intellectual performance, boys and girls who are less sex typed have been found to have higher overall intelligence, spatial ability, and creativity.

Knowing the traits society stereotypically ascribes to females, it should be no surprise to learn that girls, in general, have a more negative self-concept than boys. Philip Goldberg, for example, found that college women had a clear tendency to downgrade the work of professionals of their own sex, even when these professionals were in traditionally female fields such as home economics. Given an authoritative article supposedly written by a woman compared to the same article supposedly written by a man, both men and women of college age profess more confidence in the article by the man.

Females also react differently than males to success and failure. Doris Entwisle and Ellen Greenberger found that ninth-grade boys considered academic success a result of their own efforts, while they blamed failure on bad luck or other outside causes. Girls, on the other hand, blame themselves for failure but attribute success to outside causes or luck.

Matina Horner found a "motive to avoid success" among college women when they were faced with achievement in traditionally masculine fields. She thinks this may be caused by expectations of negative consequences, such as social rejection or

feelings of being unfeminine. Although her studies have been criticized for questionable reliability, this motive to avoid success may be verified eventually. If it exists, it certainly would seem to be a deterrent to achievement-directed behavior among women. Grace Baruch, replicating Horner's work with fifth-graders, found the motive to avoid success existing in girls of that young age.

Meanwhile, boys seem to have a harder time adjusting to their role demands as adolescents and young adults, based on evidence such as rates of referral to child guidance centers, delinquency rates, and recent studies of educational underachievement in the gifted showing such underachievement twice as frequent among boys as girls.

Ruth Hartley interviewed forty-one males, eight- and eleven-year-olds, and discovered that boys thought they were supposed to be able to fight, be athletic, run fast, play rough, be smart, know what girls don't know, know how to stay out of trouble, be noisy, get dirty, be naughty, and not cry or be softies. To answer why boys try to fill this demanding role, Hartley asked them how they viewed girls. She found that girls were seen as having to stay close to home, be clean, play quietly, be often afraid, cry when scared or hurt, spend a lot of time playing with dolls, and learn to cook, sew, and take care of children.

These same boys saw adult women as indecisive, afraid of many things, fussing, tired a lot, needing someone to help them, squeamish about blood, not knowing how to handle emergencies, unable to do dangerous things, dying more easily than men, not very intelligent, having to clean up household messes, and being sad more often than men. What boy in his right mind, Hartley asked, would not give his all to escape this alternative—despite the toll the difficult "male" role seems to impose?

Studies of children's vocational aspirations indicate that children learn quite early what roles society expects of them. Lynne Iglitzin, in a study of 290 fifth-graders, for instance, found that both boys and girls demonstrated sex stereotyping in their views of career and employment patterns, social roles in home and family, and their own expected lives as adults. Perhaps even more significant was that children with working mothers—especially girls—had more liberal views on roles of men and women in society. Role models are essential to show young female children how to combine marriage and work life satisfactorily, as O'Leary's

review of research on barriers to occupational aspirations in women clearly showed.

From research studies such as these, it seems obvious that perpetuation of the status quo in rigid and traditional sex-role expectations is repressive for members of both sexes, inhibiting both boys and girls from achieving full psychological and intellectual capabilities. While society in general seems to espouse these sex roles, we still must ask what part the school plays in perpetuating sexism by forcing youngsters into such rigidly defined roles.

## SEXISM IN CURRICULAR MATERIALS

For one thing, as educators we are all guilty of using materials that limit children from attaining their full potential.

Sexism in children's books first became a public issue in October, 1970, when the Feminist Collective on Children's Media confronted 160 authors, publishers, and other members of the children's book world with some findings. They cited results of a six-month study of basal readers from fifteen major series, done by thirty New Jersey women, who found that boys turned up in these readers as energetic, active, and resourceful, while girls were depicted as passive, intellectually limited, and fearful.

Two later, more limited studies, one by Ramona Frasher and Annabelle Walker another by Dianne Graebner, produced similar findings. Male main characters continued to outnumber female main characters by sizeable ratios. Men were shown in a wide variety of adult occupations while women were most often assigned the traditional female role, despite the fact that one-third of today's labor force is composed of women, many of them mothers of school-aged children. Men and boys outnumbered women and girls by wide margins in illustrations. Rarely did a picture appear of a girl in slacks, a mother driving a car that also was occupied by an adult male, or a boy crying, writing, or reading. The books contained both subtle sexism, with few or no biographies of famous women, for example, and blatant sexism, such as the boys' response to Smart Annabelle in one story: "We don't mind sharing our ideas with mankind, but you, after all, are a girl."

In my own content analysis of two basal readers published for third grade in 1972 and 1973, I discovered that little had changed. Males continued to outnumber females both in content

and in illustrations, and a wide disparity still existed in adult occupations depicted. For instance, one of these shows men in thirty-seven different occupations, while women are shown in six occupations outside the traditional, including canary voice trainer and queen. Another shows men in thirty-nine different occupational roles, while women are given five beyond the traditional: ballerina, maid, governess, empress, and queen. At a time when 40 percent of married women are members of the country's labor force, the reality presented by these readers is questionable. I also found both blatant and subtle sexism in story content. A story about the Olympics, for example, mentions women as participants. But when participants are discussed, all are referred to by the pronoun "he," and all illustrations are of males.

Most children's books continue to reflect this sexism innate in the English language. In addition to puns on words like "mankind," or the use of the masculine-oriented pronoun to stand for both sexes, consider examples such as these from elementary science textbooks, culled by Linda Harrison and Richard Passero: "When you think of man long ago, you probably think of cavemen. . . . Man is a curious animal. He wants to know all about nature." Using a picture test, with children instructed to circle all applicable pictures when given sentences using masculine-oriented generic nouns and pronouns or neutral forms of these sentences, Harrison and Passero discovered that third-graders do not readily envision both sexes upon presentation of such generic terms, though they do so when neutral forms are used instead. We do not know at what age youngsters develop an intellectual understanding of the generic use of words such as "mankind," "man-made," "chairman," or "he," nor what effect direct teaching strategies might have on developing such understanding. More and more frequently these days feminists are proposing, instead, that the language be changed to include new and more neutral substitutes.

Alleen Pace Nilsen blames the English language, in part, for the steady decrease of illustrations of girls and women in children's picture books since 1950. She studied eighty winners and runners-up for the Caldecott Award, given annually to the outstanding picture book published in the United States, and decided that many books, particularly those about animals, were dominated by males because the author was forced to choose between

the masculine and the feminine pronoun. Authors choose the former, Nilsen says, "because it is easy and he (or she) has been taught that masculine can stand for both men and women, although not the other way around."

She also blamed free-lance artists for slanting books toward boys. Of the eighty books she studied, ten had girls as leading characters compared to twenty-four with boys. Twelve individual authors and artists were involved in production of these ten books about girls, and nine of the twelve were women. The three men all have daughters, leading Nilsen to suggest that perhaps it "takes a special acquaintance before a man feels comfortable in picturing girls."

She also credited the decreased depiction of females in children's books to Sputnik in 1957. This Russian space triumph generated great concern over the quality of American education, resulting in a spate of easy-to-read books, almost none of which had female main characters, because most remedial reading problems occur in boys. The exclusion of females then spread to texts and trade books, Nilsen asserts.

In addition, she pointed an accusing finger at the 1961 National Defense Education Act, which gave federal funds to school libraries for purchasing books about science, a field stereotypically considered more appropriate for males. Thus, according to Nilsen, males won in two directions: in the nonfiction section of libraries because they are thought to be *more* able than girls, and in the beginning-to-read books because they are thought to be *less* able than girls.

A number of content analyses have documented sexism in trade books of all kinds, written for children of all ages. But math textbooks are no less stereotyped. Marsha Federbush in 1974 found in story problems girls were generally cooking, sewing, or watching, while mothers engaged in various forms of housewifery. She also found story problems intimating that girls lacked competence in math ("Jane couldn't figure out how to do . . ., so John helped her"), and no inclusion of female mathematicians in historical overviews.

Jamie Frishof, in a study of five widely used social studies texts for elementary schools, found essentially the same pattern. According to these texts, boys grow up to do some hundred different jobs, compared to thirty for women.

Meanwhile, Marion Meade wrote in the *New York Times* in 1970, "The only word for the feminine image on children's television is crummy," with cartoon shows the worst offenders. Jane Bergman's more recent analysis of "Sesame Street" suggested that educational television certainly was not immune to the same sex-role stereotyping.

My own review of research on sexism in children's media in mid-1975 indicated that publishers and producers were beginning to respond to feminist pressures. Two leading publishers of basal readers had issued editorial guidelines aimed at producing nonsexist materials, and a third had solicited assistance from feminist groups in developing content for a revision. In trade books, too, newer publications start to show a modernized concept of male and female roles; characters are being treated as individuals rather than as stereotypes.

Yet, publishers who responded to feminist pressures encountered other problems. Several reviewers say some new books are didactic tracts, too burdened with a message to be believable. Selma Lanes pointed out that books showing women and men doing what few women or men have done in real life were commendable, because they opened readers' eyes to the range of possibilities, but she viewed these as propaganda, not literature.

Looking at the issue from another angle, Diane Gersoni-Stavn argued that sexual stereotyping in children's books constituted propaganda, regardless of the author's intent, because such depictions were accepted by youngsters as reality. But she saw problems arising from the practices of some feminist critics: improperly isolating quotes from context, unthinking praise for books that build up girls at the expense of boys, abandoning aesthetic standards in judging books, unfairly criticizing historical fiction for showing life "the way it was," failing to work for the upgrading of traditional female roles in children's books in addition to seeking expansion of roles (because not all housewives are dreary, dull, ineffectual people), and blaming authors and publishers for "an incredible conspiracy of conditioning" instead of trying to enlighten and change them.

Despite the problems, a trend toward nonsexist literature for children seems definitely gathering strength. Producers of educational television for classroom viewing, such as the Agency for Instructional Television, also are showing awareness of the prob-

lem of sex-role stereotyping and are making conscious efforts to avoid it.

Nonetheless, sexist materials are more available today than those depicting males and females in less prescribed and inflexible roles. Sexism, then, continues to permeate the formal school curriculum through the materials educators are forced to use, for want of something better.

## SEXISM IN SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

But the school itself adds other mechanisms to provide sex-role reinforcement. Physical education and playground activities frequently are segregated. Some grade schools experiment with all-boy and all-girl classes, with activities differentiated along traditional, sex-stereotyped lines.

Even unsegregated classes usually condone, and sometimes even encourage, the sex-typed activities and interests children bring to school. Seldom do teachers question why small boys congregate in the block corner or around the jungle gym, while little girls cluster in the doll corner—why middle-grade boys race for the soccer field at recess, while girls play quiet games like jacks and jump rope. Even less frequently do teachers try to intervene to promote diversification and expansion of skills and interests for both boys and girls.

When teachers separate boys and girls for seating or lining up, they call attention to sex distinctions and sex roles. Sex frequently determines even the assignment of classroom helpers: Janie waters the plants, while John runs the projector; Paul carries the chairs, while Patsy washes the desk tops.

Too seldom do teachers consciously use resource speakers or parent participants who are also effective adult models of non-stereotyped behavior such as the woman doctor or the male dancer.

The authority structure of the school itself reinforces traditional sex roles. While 85 percent of all elementary school teachers are women, 79 percent of all elementary school principals are men. Simply by observing the relative titles of each sex in the school, children learn the different societal expectations for men and women.

By high school, boys are counseled into industrial arts and girls into home economics. Girls are encouraged to prepare for careers in nursing, teaching, social work, library work, or secretarial work. In vocational interest inventories, the career choices channel women's responses into traditional or subordinate vocational fields.

Teacher/pupil interaction is another area touched by traditional sex typing. Boys are taught, long before they enter first grade, to be independent, assertive, and aggressive. Girls, on the other hand, generally are trained to be passive, obedient, and conforming.

Because the school traditionally has been concerned with keeping order, which demands obedience and conformity, it is not surprising that in many studies boys make up the majority of teachers' behavioral problems. Girls are socialized more easily into "goodness" and thus are ignored more easily.

Ironically, the conflict boys receive from the school's expectations actually may turn out to be a positive benefit. A large number of studies indicate that teachers tend to discipline and to praise boys more than girls. Teachers also spend more instructional time with boys. Judith Barwick speculated that a boy learned in school that he could get attention from his teacher and peers for nonconforming behavior. Thus, teacher criticism, a seemingly negative response, actually may lead boys toward greater independence, autonomy, and activity.

We do not yet have solid research on how teacher discipline and criticism affect the cognitive styles and self-concepts of boys and girls. In addition, we need experiments designed to explore the effects of different curricular patterns. Patricia Minuchin, for example, speculated that girls, particularly, did not need subject-dominated rote learning but should be in classrooms stressing open-ended and searching processes of thought and emphasizing the central, active role of the student and choice in learning activities. Other critics question whether training in docility and obedience is good for anybody, male or female, if the school is genuinely concerned with facilitating learning.

While the foregoing only cursorily examines the research now pouring forth on the issue of sexism, it surely indicates that something is awry in American society and, thus, in the schools that reflect that society. What can we, as educators, do about it?

## TEACHERS NEED TRAINING FOR CHANGE

The principal hope for improvement seems to lie with classroom teachers. While commercial textbooks and other materials slowly improve, the vast majority of books and materials presently available and in classroom use continue to reflect the traditional sex roles and thinking of a patriarchal society, which is restrictive to students of both sexes.

Thus, the obvious first step would seem to be a change in teacher training: preservice and inservice courses designed to sensitize and raise the consciousness of teachers to the issue and the existence of sexism in the school.

*Women's History.* Such courses should include the history of women in American society, a history largely obliterated, as Janice Law Trecker has shown, in most widely used high school and college history textbooks. If females need role models to cause them to aspire, these models cannot be erased completely or hidden by masculine-oriented language patterns.

*Content Analysis.* As a second focus, such courses should help preservice and inservice teachers analyze the content of the textbooks and other materials now used. As awareness of sexist content develops, the primary teacher will see the necessity for pausing in the middle of a reading group to discuss the reality of "Dan is napping, while Pam makes lunch" in this world of working fathers *and* mothers, where homemaking responsibilities are being shared more fully. All teachers will see the need to give direct instruction on the generic use of male nouns and pronouns. The middle-grade teacher will see the value of sexist materials as teaching tools; children at this age can do their own content analyses, in the process learning valuable critical reading skills.

Penn State University took an important step in this direction by requiring a course in ethnic children's literature for teacher certification in elementary education. In this course, students are first exposed to blatant stereotypes, subtle distortions, and omissions in literary references to ethnic groups. Then they work with a content analysis form for racism and sexism, developed as a result of a joint Penn State/Council on Interracial Books for Children workshop on racism and sexism in classroom literature. Jane Singh, reporting on the Penn State project, says that the goal is promoting among teachers "a conscious awareness of the problems which exist and an attempt to use them, not avoid them, to educate in what is in the real book world and how to cope with it."

*Management Techniques.* As a third focus, preservice and inservice courses for teachers should emphasize classroom and school management techniques to avoid sexism. Because sex-role stereotypes are pervasive and generally taken for granted, consciousness-raising activities might help teachers understand ways they influence and oppress their students with sexist ideas and behavior.

*Curriculum Reform.* Finally, because teachers probably are at their best when they can organize and control the curriculum within set guidelines, preservice and inservice courses should focus on teacher-directed curriculum reform. That is, teachers should get help in organizing units to use with their own students, units they might later try out and evaluate, perhaps in the presence of observers. Together, teachers can learn to find, develop, and share new materials and methods for obliterating sexism in curriculum content—or, in even more direct teaching strategies, for promoting a conscious awareness of sexism among their students.

## A DIRECT TEACHING STRATEGY

Such a direct teaching strategy has been a part of the middle-grade social studies curriculum at University Elementary School in Bloomington, Indiana, since 1970, when American women were noting the fiftieth anniversary of their admission to the voting booth. Running for a nine-week interval, this study of women has had as its goal the sensitizing of children to problems of sexism in American society in the hope of opening the door to full personhood for at least some of them. The objectives of this unit are: to learn the basic history of women's suffrage; to become familiar with famous women from history; to become aware of the role problems of women today, in jobs, social life, marriage, and family; to become familiar with current issues and leaders in the women's movement; and to look at one's attitudes about sex roles.

The University School teaching strategy has fallen naturally into two sections. The first lays a historical foundation by focusing on the suffrage movement, and the second examines the contemporary women's movement. We used basic teacher-written readings in lieu of textbooks, for obvious reasons. Those dealing with the suffrage movement have been taken primarily from Eleanor Flexner's comprehensive history, *Century of Struggle*, and from Doris Faber's book for young adults, *Petticoat Politics: How American Women Won the Right To Vote*. We have modified or rewritten materials on the current women's movement as new ones have become available; those presently used draw heavily on information on the status of women from *Time's* March 20, 1972, issue.

In addition to reading the basic materials, the children re-

search and identify a number of famous women from a list of more than fifty, ranging from the gentle Lucretia Mott and that strong and strident mouthpiece for her sex, Sojourner Truth, to contemporaries like Indira Gandhi, Shirley Chisholm, Gloria Steinem, and Betty Friedan. Difficulty encountered in locating information on these women, even those long-deceased, makes pupils aware of the neglect with which women have been treated in the compiling and editing of encyclopedias and other resource materials.

Each child also completes a glossary of terms applicable to the unit, including items such as "sexism," "feminist," "stereotype," "socialization," "sex typing," and "nuclear family." Again, difficulties encountered in locating definitions lead to discussion of ways language constantly is shaped and changed by social innovations. We find this a good time, too, to look at ways language subtly expresses society's view of males and females.

We also encourage each pupil to choose and read at least one biography or autobiography about a famous woman. Students who read biographies about the same woman, written by different authors, are asked to compare factual information presented. Because discrepancies frequently occur, students become aware of the authors' research sources, documentation, and objectivity—all important critical reading skills.

A child who goes this far has laid the foundation for further independent study. Projects deal with a variety of topics, using the elementary school and the community as classroom resources.

Often, critical reading skills play a part in this independent study. Many youngsters, for example, choose to analyze depiction of males and females in the children's literature they read for their language arts classes. It would be difficult to count the times a pupil has presented a novel, carefully marked with a scrap of paper or a folded Kleenex, triumphantly remarking, "I've found another example of sexism in my book." When children are sensitized to reading perceptively and critically, books now decried by women's organizations become valuable classroom tools and the need for weeding library collections diminishes.

Other pupils may elect to study depiction of men and women in magazine, radio, or television advertisements. Some may examine basal readers used in University School's primary grades

in terms of sexist content. Others have analyzed portrayals of men and women in other media, for example, in children's cartoon television shows or family situation comedies, in comic strips or syndicated cartoon series, or in the lyrics of popular songs.

Some have developed and presented bibliographies of books about women available in the school or county libraries. Others have prepared written research reports on aspects of the suffrage movement or done comparative studies of prejudice toward women and toward blacks. Or they have surveyed attitudes of University School children at other grade levels toward working mothers, preparing charts of their findings.

We encourage pupils to interview influential career women in the community, asking questions such as: "How did you become interested in your career? How did your family feel about your going into this kind of work? What obstacles did you have to overcome? Do you feel there has been discrimination against you in terms of salary, advancement, increasing responsibility? Are you married? If so, does your work interfere with your family life? Do you recommend that other girls follow your footsteps?"

Other options for independent projects include writing plays or poems based on material from the study of women, surveying girls in first and fourth grades to detect a shift in career plans or a change in favorite school subjects, finding quotations from famous women and explaining their meaning and significance, or writing a proposal for a children's television program or book that gives a constructive view of women.

This list does not exhaust the possibilities. Each year our children have come up with creative projects of their own devising. Once a child whose mother had told her, "Black women don't have time to be involved in women's liberation; we have to get the black race liberated," decided to find out if other black women shared her mother's views. So she made up a questionnaire and mailed it to twenty-two black women—relatives, friends, and three congresswomen—sending each respondent four extra questionnaires to share with friends. From the fifty-three questionnaires returned, she made some interesting discoveries: Most women in this study thought they had been more discriminated against by being black than by being women, but 87 percent

also thought that black women should be involved in women's rights.

Three years ago one athletic girl elected to sign up for the local Boys' Club soccer league. Her action initially drew outrage from male classroom peers. Later they conceded that Dian, lone female in a family of four children, was a good soccer player and might be a genuine asset to a team. The Boys' Club, predictably, did not agree, and Dian eventually turned in a report on her experience, including her eventual dismissal from the team.

In her own words, "Not getting into Boys' Club soccer isn't that bad, even though I plan to write a letter to Judge Randy Bridges about it. But I can now understand how the women felt when they didn't have the right to vote. The boys say to join a Girls' Club, but they have never really got one started in Indiana." For Dian, and for her classmates, this was a vivid consciousness-raising experience.

Other students have analyzed science and math textbooks, created games based on identifying famous women, surveyed children at different ages regarding the satisfaction they feel being boys or girls, and made classroom displays of books approved by the Feminists on Children's Media from the 1971 bibliography, *Little Miss Muffet Fights Back*.

For the past three years, with the help of student teachers, groups of fifth-graders at University School have been encouraged to play *Psychology Today*'s simulation role-reversal game, "Woman/Man." One boy wrote in his evaluation of this experience, "Now I see what it's like to be a woman. I think that's wrong." A girl commented, "I think this game has a strong point to it. This game shows all the advantages and unadvantages of the man and woman both. This game has gotten me so frustrated, both when I was a man and woman. It is a very educational game."

## GETTING STARTED

One way we have initiated the study of women is by hanging colorful posterboard signs from the classroom ceiling, containing common clichés: Big boys don't cry. They never ask a girl what she wants to be when she grows up. A pretty girl is like a melody. Women's work is never done. After 29 a woman is over the hill. It's a man's world. She's nothing but a dumb blonde. There's more difference between a male and a female than between a horse chestnut and a chestnut horse. And so on, ad infinitum.

We also have hung brightly colored female biological signs on which are printed names of famous women, past and present.

When our study of the suffrage movement is under way, some teachers find it fun to dress in appropriate garb to deliver a series of "Who Am I" autobiographical sketches on the famous suffragettes. The children guess identities and revel at seeing their teachers clad in poke bonnets, shawls, and old-fashioned spectacles.

Often University School Principal David Rowland, a humanist who believes in genuine freedom for all, has consented to participate in a series of role-playing vignettes to introduce the second half of the study. In this endeavor he takes the part of the personnel man who asks the female Harvard Business School graduate, "Can you type?" or the newspaper editor who tells the newlywed Phi Beta Kappa journalism graduate, "I'll tell you what—if you're not pregnant in a year, come back and we'll talk business." Or the fellow who, during a serious discussion about war at a party, chucks his female companion under the chin with the comment, "Hey, you're real cute when you get mad."

We have found many films suitable for use with a study of women, including two Encyclopedia Britannica Corporation productions, "Social Change and the American Woman" and "Susan B. Anthony." We also like to take into the classroom unpreviewed films such as "Mothers: What They Do," and let the students decide whether such films should be purchased for classroom use. In the example cited, students voted "no," because the only mother shown employed full time outside the home also was head of the household, and because none of the mothers in the film were members of minority groups.

Meanwhile, other materials are brought into the classroom ranging from Marlo Thomas' "Free To Be . . . You and Me" and other feminist recordings to children's picture books expressing a new view—books such as William Pene du Bois' *William's Doll*, Eve Merriam's *Mommies at Work*, and Jay Williams' *The Practical Princess* and *Petronella*. These generate discussion on ways the world changes for each of us and on the role of propaganda in social movements and in literature.

## DOES DIRECT TEACHING "WORK"?

What effect does a direct teaching strategy like the University School study of women have on attitudes and aspirations of participants? Does it give girls the freedom to have "doctor" and "professor" in their matrix of career choices along with "truck driver," "telephone lineperson," or whatever else suits their interests and talents? Does it make boys comfortable with expressing gentleness, grief, delight in small children, dislike of athletics? Are children able to be themselves without fearing emasculation or defeminization as a consequence?

Frankly, we don't know. No empirical study of attitude change has been attempted yet, largely because no appropriate measurement instruments exist. Although the study of women aims to develop greater androgyny in both males and females, at the moment there is no test for androgyny among students younger than college-age. We are hoping, however, to begin pretesting and posttesting next year, both for movement toward greater androgyny and for change in sex-stereotyped veiws of various occupations.

Intuitively, however, we teachers who have directed the study of women believe that change does take place. Every year parents—both mothers and fathers—have come back to thank us for differences they perceive in their youngsters. Interestingly, most of these parents have reported changes in girl children, though one divorced mother phoned, a year after her son had been involved in the study, to report his comment, "The unit on women changed my whole life." Asked why, he had told her, "I used to be embarrassed not to have a dad around. After that unit on women, I realized that women can do the same things men can."

This particular boy was different from many who preceded him. When it began, the study of women was required for all sixth-graders at University School. In those years, it often seemed that girls were changed, while boys frequently grew more vocally and rigidly sexist. Then sixth grade was moved to the middle school, and changes in teaching staff shifted the study of women to an option in fifth grade. Relatively few boys choose it now; those who do often come from single-parent homes or are influenced by feminist fathers.

Because of our experience, we were not surprised in December, 1975, when Harvard psychologist Marcia Guttentag reported results of a six-week experimental curriculum designed to teach sexual equality, used with more than 1,000 Boston children in three age groups: kindergarten, fifth grade, and ninth grade. Results showed that fifth-grade boys with working mothers and ninth-grade boys with working and nonworking mothers became notably more stereotyped in their views of women and more rigid and outspoken about "woman's place" after the six-week program. Many of the girls, on the other hand, turned into fledgling feminists, with ninth-grade girls most responsive to the teaching strategy and showing the greatest attitude change. We suspect that findings may be similar at University School.

Guttentag's work suggests that children pick up what they see around them far more readily than what adults tell them. They see men in power and in a wider variety of occupations; they see mothers responsible for most child care. And boys, at least, are unwilling to give up the familiar for the abstract advantage of more flexible personalities. However, girls do change, and perhaps hope of altering present reality lies here. One evaluation of the ultimate success of direct teaching strategies might be the greater proportion of girls who aspire to and attain a work role in society. Guttentag's work suggests that if reality changes, so will children's attitudes.

We do know that committed feminist teachers can make changes in curriculum content and organization in their own classrooms; they also can exert the continuing pressures necessary to bring changes within a school. We have seen this happen at University School, where recess games now are integrated by teacher fiat, textbook salesmen are openly confronted by questions like "Why are there no girls in your first pre-primer?" and

the male physical education teacher offers wrestling as an option for girls, on grounds that some participation is essential even for informed spectatorship.

Our librarian now consults feminist booklists like *Little Miss Muffet Fights Back* when spending acquisition funds, and she seeks out good biographies of women to augment the pitiful resources available on women in standard reference works.

No longer do we see plays at University School where boys are the intrepid explorers and scouts who carry on the dialogue while girls, the squaws, sit silent at stage-rear. Meanwhile, there is a conscious attempt to bring in resource persons who do not reinforce traditional occupational sex typing. And, at faculty meetings, sexist practices frequently are a topic for impromptu discussions.

The process has been slow, but change definitely is afoot, and it has been brought about solely through the consciousness-raising efforts of a handful of teachers sensitive to the issue.

## CHANGE IS ESSENTIAL

That such change is essential if we are to educate all children for effective life in our society seems certain. Bernice Newgarten has pointed out that the family cycle has quickened since 1890; youths marry earlier today, and couples have their last child sooner. As a result, many women have forty or more years of living to do after the last-born child is in first grade. Meanwhile, 90 percent of American women work outside the home at some point in their lives.

Moreover, federal legislation during the past decade has opened new vocational doors to women. For example, passage of the Comprehensive Health Manpower Training Act in 1971 makes sexual discrimination in admissions illegal for schools of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, and nursing, if they receive federal funds. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 extends the coverage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and hence the jurisdiction of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, to public employees, educators, and professional people. Pregnant employees no longer can be forced to quit their jobs, and paid maternity leaves seem likely. Headway also is apparent regarding equal pay; the average starting monthly pay offered to women college graduates now differs only a few dollars from that of men in many fields.

American schools cannot afford to ignore such changes; as educators we need to provide better counseling for women, with attention to timing of family and work cycles. We must encourage women to take advantage of the increasing freedoms being proffered. If a young woman realizes that she is likely to work for thirty or more years, she may decide to prepare for a challeng-

ing career instead of settling for a temporary or dead-end job. Choices for women in our society are limited today only by interests, talents, motivations, and attitudes, and the school can play a part in influencing each of these.

However, work by Paul Torrance suggests that education, while useful, sets limits for women in a culture in which assumptions about their own inferiority run deep in both their own consciousness and that of men. Torrance, in experiments with third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders in 1959, found girls reluctant to manipulate science toys, on the premise that, as girls, they were not expected to know about such things. Torrance asked parental and teacher cooperation in attempting to change these attitudes. When he retested in 1960, he discovered that girls participated willingly and even with enjoyment. They also performed as well as boys in efforts to manipulate or change the toys. But one thing had not changed; the boys' contributions still were more highly valued, both by other boys and by the girls, regardless of the fact that both sexes had scored equally well. So it seems that behavior patterns are more amenable to change than attitudes.

Children arrive at school with attitudes already established, largely through exposure to parents and the mass media. As educators, we can only hope that in our schools direct and indirect teaching strategies aimed at eradicating sexism eventually may produce a generation of parents who consciously will raise both male and female children to the kind of androgyny that will permit full expression of each child's potential. If we can make children today consciously aware of child-rearing practices that have helped them, perhaps we can change such child-rearing practices in the future.

This seems of prime concern today. We already know that individuals in our society benefit psychologically, socially, and intellectually when they are less sex typed in behavior and attitudes. And many observers have questioned, at a time when competition fills our skies with smog and pollutes our lakes and streams, whether society itself might be better off if we were all more feminized in the direction of concerned cooperation.

Educators have an obligation, most probably would agree, not only to reflect but also to shape society and, with it, human experience. The answers are not all in, but surely we have some awareness of the direction in which we ought to be moving.

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